

the vocation for many. If only the poor souls—many of whom are darker in mind than body—having been taken in the bosom of mother Church, will persevere in its teachings, then on that last day will they be seen with their brethren, we "have fought the good fight and kept the faith."

Catholic American.

REV. PETER J. DE SMET.

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER.

Thirty years ago the names of few, if any, of our Catholic priests were better known to the people of the country than the name of Rev. Peter J. De Smet, S. J., the celebrated Indian missionary. Indeed it may be said, his name and his fame were co-extensive with the civilized world.

Father De Smet was a native of Belgium. He came to this country when young and was one of the early Jesuits of the Jesuit Missouri province. As near as we can guess, he was ordained priest either some time in the late twenties or in the early thirties. When still a young priest he went as missionary to the Indians of the great Northwest, and it was to the salvation of those poor children of the forest that he devoted in a special manner the remainder of his long life. About 1840 there appeared his letters, descriptive of his labors among the Indians and of the vast regions through which he travelled. Those letters were read with great interest by thousands, both in Europe and America.

We knew Father De Smet very well, and now as we write his name, his striking appearance comes back to mind quite vividly. We remember him as a stoutly-built man of medium size, with long, iron-gray hair and a singularly benignant expression of countenance. He was not distinguished as a scholar or a preacher. Neither was he what might be called a brilliant conversationalist. Yet no

man's company was more sought after, because no man's company was more agreeable. He had a fund of anecdotes, which he would tell in a way that was just delightful. He had no style about him at all—none of that reserve which some people think necessary, but which is oftentimes only the indication of meanness and selfishness of character. What the Roman Breviary says of St. Vincent de Paul, that he was *cunctis affabilis ac semper sibi constans* (that he was affable to all and always self-consistent), could be said in all truth of Father De Smet. He would speak to anyone and could be spoken to by anyone. You never left this good man's camp without feeling the better for having seen and spoken with him.

But perhaps a few anecdotes will better illustrate his character than a detailed account of his life and labors. The anecdotes have, at least, the merit of being substantially true. We will let Father De Smet speak in the first person, and as far as we can remember it use his exact language. "I left St. Louis in the summer of 1851, on the steamer St. Ange, for our Indian missions. I had as my travelling companion Father Hoecken. When far up the Missouri river the cholera broke out on the steamer, and I was one of the first taken down with the dread disease. I thought my last hour was come and asked Father Hoecken to administer the last sacraments of the Church to me. He was beginning to hear my confession when there was a hurried rap at our state room door and a call for one of us to go to the lower deck and prepare a man dying of the cholera. Go, I said to Father Hoecken, and prepare the poor man, I can wait. I had to wait much longer than I expected. There were several men sick with cholera on the lower deck whom Father Hoecken had to attend to. He was taken with the cholera himself, and was brought back in a dying con-

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